

FULL SET OF EQUITY AND SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNITY CONVERSATION NOTES

The purpose of the Sustainable DC initiative is to create a strategic framework and vision to make the District the greenest, healthiest, and most livable city in the United States. Throughout the planning process, several “crosscutting” topic areas emerged: health, environmental education, jobs and job preparation, and social equity.

The following full set of notes from the conversation about equity held on June 21, 2012, represents the ideas of more than 40 individuals who participated in person or provided feedback online about social equity and how it relates to issues of sustainability as well as the implementation of the plan for a Sustainable DC. This information will be used in the development of the Sustainable DC Implementation Plan.

1. What are significant challenges regarding equity in the District?

- **Group 1 (Stacie)**

- Funding
- Awareness; are people informed of differences throughout the city?
- Differences in income distribution; employment, health, and other challenges are all connected to income issues
- Need to educate people that sustainability and equity go together
- Social discrimination; integration
- Nutrition, access to secure food sources
- Equity is not just about affordable housing, also relates to nutrition/food, protecting cultural & heritage resources/assets
 - Protecting these assets and the environment will bring about affordability, sustainability
- Despair, hopelessness, and hostility – re: financial literacy
- Fear around being targeted/specific about inequity (universalism can make us less focused on equity; some people may fear redistributive policies)
- Metrics/indices → what’s the return?

- **Group 2 (Brendan)**

- Access to capital, rates of return – business start up, home purchases/improvement, community organizations
- Uneven economic development, services
- Gentrification, not enough mixed-low income units, equal distribution of displaced households, include low income in projects across city, impacts of best practices (tree canopy)

- **Group 3 (Dan)**

- Community participation
- Affordable housing/planning for mixed income housing across city
- High cost of DC in general
- “rules of the game” often favor some people over others, e.g. – where we make investments
- Involving community from the beginning on solutions
- Whole community should benefit from public investment (ex. – money from increased land prices should go back to the city to spend)
- Value capture
- Small businesses are not equipped to take current opportunities (MBE: Minority Business Enterprise)
- Equity itself is a hard conversation, which can end before it starts

- Vocabulary/jargon
- Sustainability as a word is an obstacle
- **Group 4 (Laine and John)**
 - DC is becoming more gentrified than ever – rising rents
 - Lack of assets to income – household income is low compared to higher incomes of new residents
 - Closing of public schools due to lack of enrollment
 - Wards 7 & 8 have a lack of local economy (lots of small incidental costs; energy) and jobs – adds to transportation costs
 - Transportation costs are high and prices rising
 - Wards 7 & 8 are most undeveloped and have most public housing. Mixed income replacements.
 - Metro brings development for community & commercial development
 - Gentrification is a form of genocide
 - Only people who can afford it will live there – Comp Plan
 - People need to get involved in planning process – day to day needs prevent this
 - Educational deterioration, need charter schools so schools can compete globally in STEM topics
 - 2 worst performing schools are in Ward 7 – education as an equity issue
 - A divided city between people who move here and people who grew up here
 - Larger federal policy implications from presidential level
 - Welfare system affects the family dynamic/demographics
 - More gentrified than ever, high incomes coming in & people who are more highly educated

2. Are there any people or communities who might not yet embrace Sustainable DC? Why do you think that might be?

- **Group 1 (Stacie)**
 - If you don't have specific connections to a particular sustainability piece, there's probably a general lack of awareness
 - Who is in the room? It's just the usual suspects
 - Foxhall Road – have folks over there bought into this? They may fear that this is a redistribution effort
- **Group 2 (Brendan)**
 - TANF, Ex-offenders (Wheeler Terrance model of educating residents – build habits; creative ways to reach out)
 - High wealth who want to buy their way out – measure impact on environment/community
 - Mobility problems, isolated groups (i.e. – public housing) – start where people are
 - Youth population, school, training
 - Service industry education
- **Group 3 (Dan)**
 - Well-to-do, wealthy may not be concerned
 - Lower income populations may not make connection (especially sustainability to economics and equity)
 - Not always top concern of populations, but may have other priorities over that
 - “sustainability” and “green” may not resonate
 - New immigrant communities
 - Low English proficiency speakers
 - Not sure about goals – need specifics: “meat” or Vision bones

- May not be aware of how reaching goals in Vision may affect them – good or bad
- Fear that plan will force people to leave homes because of money (gentrification)
- Why? Not engaged, don't see connection to self
- Inclusion – need to show the many connections/benefits in various ways (like different levels of affordability)
- Housing (affordable; workforce)
- Education may help (impact of buying)
- City should be a model, lead by example (buying, disposal)
- Sustainability often means increased prices. Is there a way to use co-op model/support programs to make available to more people?
- Behavior/culture change required for success. Example: increase in bike culture to reach goals – command behavior change (attitude), nurture
- How to increase bike/healthy habit “culture” especially with history of abuse/mistrust
- **Group 4 (Laine and John)**
 - Busy people with difficult lives
 - Maybe meetings can be more receptive
 - People haven't heard about this in the press
 - Methods of communication between the city and people who don't use email regularly
 - Needs to be more personally relevant (jobs, food, everyday)
 - People are engaged when it affects them directly
 - Frame the conversation so people can see themselves in it
 - Can't just be so environmental: emphasize the social aspects
 - Could go through environmental nonprofits
 - Maybe reach out to social nonprofits – less in Ward 7 & 8
 - Lack of information, due to local ANC reps – where are the ANC reps?
 - A racial difference about sharing info
 - Not held accountable
 - Everyday issues dominate, ex: trash

3. How can we present Sustainable DC or topics of sustainability to individuals or groups who may feel that sustainability doesn't relate to them?

- **Group 1 (Stacie)**
 - Getting different messengers/relationships with different groups (ex. – Dennis Chestnut has an in with the garden club)
 - Environmental message is overdone, especially at the expense of focusing on other messages (What else resonates with people? Business case? Social equity case?)
 - Post information where people are (bars, clubs, restaurants, etc.)
 - Support webcasting, interactions over the web, making opportunities available to people who can't be there in person
 - Do something radical to cause action, get people out, and get them fired up (e.g. – announce something far-fetched, like the closing of Frederick Douglass' home to get people out)
 - Calibrate the message
 - Market isn't monolithic
 - Lead with other messages first (e.g. – lead w/ “equity” instead of “sustainability”)
 - Use resonant examples, especially among people who aren't traditionally part of the conversation

- Who is the target? Messaging is different for different targets
 - Target grandparents to also capture the youth audience
 - Also: establish programs to lift up the older generations, who are often forgotten about, but also influence younger generations
 - “What’s in it for me?” messaging
 - For example, at a meeting at Barry Farm, talk about jobs (but must make it real – can’t advertise that it’s a jobs conversation and lead with sustainability and have jobs be item 5 or 6, or step 5 or 6 in the process)
 - Another example: have Dennis Chestnut focus on nature and food.
 - Find the people who have standing in the community to deliver the message – the one who can bring 10.
 - Pathway to specificity – this is a town of plans & promises, to be successful, must show what will specifically happen/is already happening
 - Educational piece
 - Challenges and recognition – for example, the city could issue challenges and then recognize innovation, ideas
 - Need to understand the framework – some communities operate in a world within a world (for example, referring to an article in Newsweek, many in the African American community operate outside of the metrics that people typically use to measure groups)
 - Sustainability → make the connection that it’s the transfer of knowledge from one generation to another
 - Personal financial investment (example – people weren’t coming out to talk about fishing on the Anacostia, but they did come out to a focus group on subsistence fishing when offered \$50 and fishing equipment) as a way to reach the hard-to-reach
- **Group 2 (Brendan)**
 - Tailor to community needs, interests – focus on job creation to needy areas, social pressure on higher incomes
 - Introduce youth to jobs/careers/livelihoods related to sustainable practices
 - Present ideas/messages that relate to daily lives
 - Meet people where they are: physically, figuratively
 - Shorter, simple messages – target where people are (homes, apartments, grocery, where people are having fun); frame for audience
 - Messaging tools, social media: send message that people understand
 - Use existing community groups and neighbor connections; peer to peer
 - Challenges and competitions (rewards?)
 - Initial outreach should lead to embedded practices, way of life
 - Use “gateway” steps to build interest
 - React to new lifestyle interests (no car...)
 - Message: focus on small business to grow buy-in organically
- **Group 3 (Dan)**
 - Plan to teach culture change – learning by example
 - Lots of research/study to back up tree planting, whatever would be helpful/connect to neighborhood and focus on that and don’t focus on negative aspects
 - LISTEN – meet people where they are; relate to what they care about and connect (ex. – Wheeler Terrace is very energy efficient, but community cares about safety; developed, changed fears to safety, now community is gated)

- Don't have a "sustainability meeting" – go to church meetings, ANCs, etc. – find out what they care about/how to hook green to them
- Can't ignore past wrongs/abuse – need to acknowledge past wrongs or lack of trust
- Respect history while moving forward
- Respect and use existing social order and capitalize on it

- **Group 4 (Laine and John)**

- Consider the social marketing approach – what does it mean and what does it mean to them?
- Needs to be high level political investment, fines and follow-up messaging & approach
- Tell people how they can participate
- Don't create fear; it's not an elite green city
- Define good vs. bad choices & rewards vs. consequences → what are you prepared to do
- Transient community may not be as invested in the overall community
- Renters less invested than owners – sense of responsibility
- If you live in a richer community, you get more social services (ex. Oakland Performance Art, I Matter Youth program)
- Reach people who won't be reached by the political stuff

4. What are important equity goals or targets that we can emphasize in the Sustainable DC Implementation Plan?

- **Group 1 (Stacie)**

- Emphasize goals that relate to housing (people want to know if they can stay in their house/neighborhood)
- Jobs – emphasize helping the unemployed and underemployed
- Play up goals that help people who have felt left out of starting businesses (green economy)
- Impact Assessments – analyzing positive & negative impacts of decisions; need a lens/process for analyzing impacts, e.g. Health Impact Assessment
- Social Impact Assessments – these are currently more ad hoc, but should be made more of standard procedure in the equity/sustainability process
- Don't focus on Return on Investment when striving for goals (e.g. – if a goal is 75%, WHICH 75%? Don't just go for low-hanging fruit, look for who could benefit the most, not just easy targets.)

- **Group 2 (Brendan)**

- Household wealth distribution
- Decrease unemployment in high areas
- Geographic/spatial analysis across whole range of targets/goals (hard to measure changing populations)
- Housing affordability, distribution (how measured?); affordable to whom? What populations, workforce?
- Business ownership demographics – self employment and cooperative ownership
- Environmental health, risk measures (asbestos, lead, asthma, air quality)
- Educational attainment
- Access to transit, walkable lifestyle
- Type of development

- **Group 3 (Dan)**

- Community control over community-created benefits (how to measure later)

- All affordable housing retrofitted for energy efficiency – but how to include middle income in that too
- Rank priorities; some will care about energy, some health – rank using fiscal stats
- Inclusion; communication; engagement
- Must measure different things for different groups – can't be citywide; break down geographically
- Reduce disparities – the distance between highest & lowest
- **Group 4 (Laine and John)**
 - Examples: projects per Ward, # of establishments protecting the environment
 - Make sure meeting minimum requirements
 - Food desert issue (access to healthy food)
 - Create equity measure for all the goals in the Vision – look for disparities
 - Community engagement → cultivate a culture of sustainability
 - Partner with schools and churches
 - Different communities talk to each other differently → invest in local leaders, create local champions
 - Potential large companies headquartered here
 - Do a poll/survey to understand people's interests and values. Get specific to the problems; short – 15-20 questions.
 - Find out the "cool factor" – example: sustainable Jordans
 - Put posters on buses and Metro trains
 - Self-sufficiency, stability, sustainability
 - More government agencies participating together than ever before

5. Moving forward, what specific actions can the District take to ensure that Sustainable DC initiatives are implemented equitably? How do we measure that initiatives are implemented equitably?

- **Group 1 (Stacie)**
 - Be prepared to set clear expectations (e.g. – in plans, policies, equity has to be evident and a priority → clearly written out)
 - DC gov needs to complete the listening process, vet things thru communities
 - Funding: invest in all neighborhoods, not just hotspots
 - Recognize successful projects, especially equity-related; celebrate accomplishments
 - Use specific language around goals, who we're trying to reach
 - Stop talking about it as Mayor Gray's plan – needs to exist beyond current administration
 - Capacity-building within DC gov staff: they need to be educated/trained around equity issues
 - Structure change: policy needs to be vetted on the front end, not just through a 30 day review listed in the public record. The public comment period should happen before policy/regulatory changes are made/determined.
- **Group 2 (Brendan)**
 - Lock-in from Mayor to Mayor
 - Need to bring Council on board
 - Shift burden away from government to businesses and nonprofits
 - Embed in long-term plans, law
 - Ensure resources are there – gov't role to encourage, subsidize, small grants

- How can you leverage, combine community resources (political, financial, legislative)
- Grassroots support to hold politicians accountable in the future
- Focus gov't activity on core services to support community initiatives
- Coordinate private sector investment
- Communications: more effective outreach, out in the community, robo-calls
- Participatory budgeting to effectively target funds

- **Group 3 (Dan)**

- Ask people – in communities – how do you think we're doing? Gather public opinion
- Link to new Grade DC – citizen ranking of government
- Don't measure things that are easy to count
- Don't confuse public benefits with public benefit agreements (they expire) – end that
- End silo-ing at DC agencies. Government & public collaborations – what continues framework (rewards will exist to continue collaboration now happening because of Mayor Gray's focus)
- Institutionalize process
- No Wrong Door approach (UK) – can't turn away and say it's not your job – fix together regardless of whose job

- **Group 4 (Laine and John)**

- Needs to be systematic. Do a needs assessment and then solve the problems.
- Show how what benefits one area can benefit other areas
- Need to set critical benchmarks. Be clear about what equity is and for whom. Equity is race, geography, income, economics
- Can be equitable but not just
- There needs to be an equity official – part of all government, systematic → need the policy and the mentality
- Needs more interactions between different parts of the city
- Need local community partners
- Needs to be a balance in the number of affordable housing

6. What actions can you take to steer this process and empower your community?

- **Group 1 (Stacie)**

- Local solutions come from really local level (smaller than ANC); their suggestions and successes that they have working with government spill over, show that they are getting what they want/need
- Community networks/exchanges – this is important, but small groups may distrust government because they were made promises before
- Citizens must build their own social capital (no one way, but being neighborly helps)
- Communities need to inventory their assets → outsiders/government may not recognize what's important to local residents (this relates to improving communication)
- Citizens must be able to communicate up to officials – traditional ways still important, but letter-writing may be cumbersome
- ID one or two “funnels of information” – people to monitor what's going on in gov/at public meetings and let others know

- **Group 2 (Brendan)**

- Direct outreach by students, faculty, peers
- Make city space (UDC, other) available
- Grassroots activity on legislation

BONUS: Anything else we should know?

- **Group 1 (Stacie)**
 - Suggestion: look at initiatives of Seattle/King County around equity
 - Direct incentives are good (e.g. – Mayor Bloomberg put in new energy efficient fridges in public housing)
 - Trusted sources are important (ex. – a nurse from the community where she works wasn't a trusted source because she "had letters at the end of her name" – had to get other to share the message and dig to the right layer to be effective at her local initiatives)